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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 LA PAZ 000733

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SUBJECT: MAS ONLY PARTY READY FOR CONSTITUENT ASSEMBLY

Classified By: Amb. David N. Greenlee for reasons 1.4 (b) and (d).

11. (C) Summary: President Morales' Movement Toward Socialism (MAS) party is mobilizing its formidable machinery for the Constituent Assembly (CA) and is forming new alliances with various social and political groups. The MAS is allegedly "buying" votes via the Venezuelan-backed program to issue identification documents to previously disenfranchised voters and is attempting to alter the CA enabling legislation to bolster its position and weaken that of the political opposition. While the CA enabling law permits new political parties, citizens' groups and indigenous organizations to submit candidates, the April 3 deadline for meeting the National Electoral Court's registration requirements presents a logistical obstacle to widespread participation. Meanwhile, the opposition, apparently still reeling from its defeat in the December elections, is struggling to provide a meaningful counterweight to the MAS, with little hope for success. End summary.

12. (C) President Morales' Movement Toward Socialism (MAS) party, a well-organized (and well-financed) machine in its own right, is gearing up for the Constituent Assembly (CA) and is forming alliances with various social and political groups to extend its reach. The MAS has already won endorsements from prominent social and indigenous organizations such as the Federation of Miners Cooperatives (FENCOMIN), the Movement without Fear (MSM), the Labor Union of Rural Bolivian Workers (CSUTCB), and the Regional Workers Union (COR) of La Paz. The MAS is encouraging these and other small political parties/citizens groups to propose their own slate of candidates (and therefore appear "independent"), the intended result being MAS control of both the majority and minority representatives for each electoral district.

13. (C) With its Venezuelan-financed program to issue identification documents to previously disenfranchised voters, the MAS is reportedly "buying" support for its CA candidates. Several Embassy interlocutors tell us that the carnets, provided free of charge, come with strings attached (in effect, the citizen must vote for the MAS). One member of Congress believes that, based on the last census (reputed to underrepresent Bolivia's population) and the numbers of

carnets the GOB plans to distribute, government identification cards will be "issued" to around 700,000 persons who don't exist. The MAS is also leading an effort to modify the CA's enabling legislation to eliminate government subsidies of political parties during the CA campaign. The MAS plans to publicly decline such funds as an austerity measure, and to criticize its opponents for not following suit. A deputy with the National Unity (UN) party told us that the MAS won't succeed in changing the law, but will drag the opposition through the mud in an attempt to gain votes. The MAS is also attempting to postpone the deadline for voter registration for the CA to allow the citizens receiving carnets (who are presumably more likely to support the MAS) to participate in the election.

14. (C) While the CA enabling legislation permits new political parties, citizens' groups and indigenous organizations to submit candidates, the April 3 deadline for meeting the National Electoral Court's registration requirements presents a logistical obstacle to widespread participation. Many indigenous and women's groups are frantically searching for alliances with existing political parties or citizens groups, as they couldn't obtain the signatures required to form a new legal entity by April 3. Only two organizations, the Bolivian Social Democrats (BSD) and Potosi Mayor Rene Joaquin's Social Alliance (AS), began the registration process in a timely manner; one other group, the Patriotic Social Union Movement (Muspa), has completed the process.

15. (C) In the absence of new political organizations, opposition to the MAS in the CA will likely be the same major parties that ran in the December election, many of which are

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still reeling from their defeat. The UN and Podemos are only beginning to look for CA candidates; they are struggling with how to provide a meaningful counterweight to the MAS. The UN is attempting to work out an under-the-table deal with Podemos and the MNR to run only one opposition slate of candidates in each district. Such a deal has been met with interest, but real political leadership is lacking to push it forward. Both Jorge "Tuto" Quiroga and Samuel Doria Medina are keeping a low political profile. Quiroga is challenged by the split of the National Democratic Action party (ADN), his former party, from the Podemos coalition. Many doubt that Podemos or the UN will nominate a full slate of national candidates for the CA due to lack of organization and funding. Several parties which did not participate in the December elections (like the newly-formed Social Alliance in Potosi or Sucre's Free Bolivia Movement (MBL) may be able to sway some voters in a few departments, but appear to have limited national capacity.

16. (C) Comment: Morales' stated goal is for the MAS to take the CA by an overwhelming majority, by electing as many as 70 percent of the CA delegates. Clearly, the MAS is the only party with a well-defined strategy for the CA and the funding to match. If the opposition doesn't unite quickly and convince its financiers (like Doria Medina) to open up their coffers, they'll weaken their opportunity to have a sizable role in the CA, thus giving the MAS control to re-write Bolivia's constitution. End comment.

GREENLEE